

CONSULAR OFFICERS: BABY SITTERS, ETC.

And Confessors, Psychiatrists and
Social Workers, Official Says
After Guyana Criticism

By GRAHAM HOVEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 29 — After the State Department was badgered for days because its consular officers had failed in periodic visits to discover the repression in the People's Temple settlement in Guyana, one official said in exasperation, "We're not baby sitters."

However, in a private conversation later, a high-ranking department official involved in consular affairs took issue. "That's exactly what we are — baby sitters," he said, referring to the 750 consular officers spread thinly over 250 United States diplomatic missions in 113 countries around the world.

"We also have to try to be father confessors, psychiatrists, social workers and what have you," he added.

A Fact of Life

It seems to be a fact of life that consular officers can rarely perform promptly or extensively enough to satisfy either the steadily increasing numbers of Americans who get into serious trouble abroad or their families and relatives back home.

In addition to these frustrations, there has been a steady increase in the consular officer's routine chores, such as issuing visas and passports, serving as notary public and acting as "provisional conservator" of the property of Americans who die abroad. In addition, he also often suffers from morale problems.

"It is unfortunate but true that a number of our consular officers feel that they are treated as 'second-class citizens' by their counterparts in the foreign Service and by top management in the department," Barbara M. Watson, Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, told a House subcommittee last year.

Quarters Unattractive

"Abroad, they often find themselves in cramped, unattractive and ill-suited quarters, sometimes located blocks from the embassy. When the 'country team' meets to discuss the overall policies and goals of the mission, the senior consular officer may be conspicuous by his or her absence.

"Promotional opportunities within the consular cone are not in step with other areas of the Foreign Service because of a lower rank structure assigned to consular work. Many of our better officers find they must transfer to political, administrative and other cones to attain senior grades or to qualify for the choice assignments."

One result is that there are more consular positions in United States missions overseas than there are consular officers to fill them. However, a senior official said, "there is always a surplus of political officers."

Not Everyone Agrees

Miss Watson was in a familiar role, testifying at hearings called to investigate charges by bitter parents and relatives about the failure, as they viewed it, of United States consular officers to perform adequately with regard to Americans killed, imprisoned or missing in foreign countries.

Not all consular officers agree with Miss Watson that their service has unique morale problems. "It may sound like a gruesome job, but most consular officers enjoy their work because they are doing something, helping someone to solve his problems," an official said.

But Foreign Service professionals, reached in a week in which the State Department found itself on the defensive every day about the tragedy in Guyana, felt strongly that most Americans had no understanding of the limits of diplomatic and consular authority.

"They are not F.B.I. agents," said John A. Bushnell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. He was referring to the consular officers who had carried out 75 interviews with members of the People's Temple without finding one who would admit to being held against his will or who wished to leave.

Not Police, Not Judges

"We are not police officers, and we are not judges," another high-ranking State Department official said. He referred to the fact that the first involvement of embassy and consular personnel with the People's Temple in Jonestown had been in connection with a legal fight over custody of a child between two factions of an American family.

Some officials admit privately that the State Department ought to have acted more vigorously on the warning it received last summer about the mass suicide pact of the People's Temple, but they say the warning was delivered to the Guyanese Government and they ask, in effect, what else would you have had us do?

"I don't know how we could have prevented this, short of going in with troops and police," a senior official said, "and, of course, in a foreign country, you have to rely on that country's troops and police."

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Laws Must Be Obedied

Running through all comments by officials on public complaints about services furnished by embassy or consular officers is the belief that a great many among the 10 million Americans who now travel abroad each year simply do not realize that they must obey the laws and adhere to the customs of the countries they visit.

In a recent year, more than 7,500 Americans were arrested in other countries, and more than 1,600 are now in foreign jails, most of them young people.

Older Americans are also traveling abroad in ever increasing numbers and this, too, adds to the work of the consuls. In 1976, more than half a million passports were issued to Americans over 60 years old. On the average, 10,000 Americans die abroad each year and 10,000 others are reported missing.

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Jurisdiction, Witness Problems Cited

U.S. Stymied in Jonestown Probe

By Charles R. Babcock
Washington Post Staff Writer

CHARLESTON, S.C., Nov. 29—It is becoming increasingly unlikely that the FBI investigation of the Peoples Temple murders and mass suicides in Guyana will result in federal prosecutions on any charges, including the murder of Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.).

Nor will officials be able to detain survivors of the cult, despite fears of former members that they might be targets of further violence.

Justice Department officials said today that their efforts have been hampered by a narrow legal jurisdiction, the inability to carry the investigation into a foreign country, and the deaths of many—if not all—of the suspects and some witnesses.

Michael Abbell, the Justice Department attorney coordinating the inquiry into Ryan's death, said that, for instance, two of the five men named by eyewitnesses as firing at Ryan's party were identified among the dead at the scene of the subsequent mass suicide led by the Rev. Jim Jones, the cult's leader.

More than 900 cult members died in the South American jungle commune of Jonestown. But since U.S. law usually does not apply in foreign countries, the investigation is restricted to seeking Ryan's murderers under a recent congressional assassinations act.

Abbell said "it is likely" that all the suspects in Ryan's death are dead. But he said investigators still are checking

fingerprints of the bodies flown back to the United States for positive identification.

A third suspect in the shooting of Ryan and four others, Larry Layton, has been charged and is being held in Guyana. The government there so far has refused an FBI request to send in a team of investigators. So agents have been standing by here to question the returning survivors who witnessed the murders.

Officials said today though that it is probable the Guyanese government will detain some of these witnesses for possible trials there. Seven elderly survivors from Jonestown were scheduled to arrive in New York City tonight, but officials said these survivors apparently know little about the murders at the airstrip in Port Kaituma, Guyana.

As a result of the delay, Charles Devic, the FBI special agent in charge here, said today that he has released about 20 of the 30 agents called in to help question the survivors. "We're in a holding pattern," he said. "It looks like it might be several days before anyone shows up here."

An FBI spokesman in Washington said agents across the country are checking reports that the Peoples Temple had compiled a "hit list" of prominent politicians and journalists to be kidnapped or assassinated if anything happened to Jones or the cult.

Mark Lane, an attorney for Jones who escaped the massacre at Jonestown, has said he has been questioned about such a list, but Abbell said that a list mentioned by other persons interviewed by the FBI included the name of "President Nixon."

The investigation has uncovered no evidence that this early list was credible or that there is a more current one, Abbell added.

While some of the survivors in Guyana have expressed fear and suspicion about violent behavior by others from the camp, authorities would have no basis for detaining them when they return to the United States, officials agreed.

And an FBI spokesman denied reports that new guidelines limiting investigations of domestic groups prevented the bureau from being forwarded about the violence at Jonestown. FBI Director William H. Webster believes that imposition of the guidelines had no bearing on the outcome of the tragedy in Guyana, the spokesman said.

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